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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000853

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/CPR, PA/IGA (AWELCHER AND NTHOMPSON)
STATE ALSO FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/PD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OMAN SEEKS ASSISTANCE IN PREPARING FOR HIGH-PROFILE SHIP VISIT

1. This is an action request; please see paragraph 6.

2. SUMMARY: Building on the success of Oman's participation in the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Sultanate plans to raise its profile in the U.S. by sending a tall ship to at least three East Coast ports in July 2007. The visit will be the springboard for a larger program of special events, media products, and, if all goes well, substantial publicity highlighting the U.S.-Oman bilateral relationship and the many historical, cultural, and economic achievements that set Oman apart in its region. To move the project forward, a delegation led by the Muscat Municipality President (equivalent of mayor) will visit the U.S. in late June/early July. Post requests the support of the Department and other entities to assure the visit's success. END SUMMARY.

3. The Ambassador met May 27 with officials organizing the July 2007 U.S. visit of the "Shabab Oman" ("Youth of Oman"), a 52-meter barquentine, Oman's "maritime ambassador" and the Arab world's only tall ship. The organizing committee, led by President of the Muscat Municipality Abdallah bin Abbas bin Ahmad, includes representatives of the Diwan (royal court), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant bodies. The committee has been charged by the Sultan to create an ambitious, large-scale, "unique" event that will reflect the depth and strength of U.S.-Oman ties and promote Oman as a stable, prosperous center of culture and tradition. It is also meant to raise awareness of the reinvigorated Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center (SQCC) at Washington's Middle East Institute. The "Shabab Oman," in service since 1971, has twice visited the U.S., in 1986 (Statue of Liberty centennial celebration) and 1992 (Columbus quincentennial).

4. In the U.S., Oman's embassy and SQCC have done preliminary planning for the project, including identifying as potential destinations New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC. Plans for surrounding activities are still embryonic, but include a traveling Omani Cultural Village visitor attraction, associated public programs, and products including a book, a documentary film, and a range of handouts. Organizers indicate that they are in the last stages of hiring a U.S. events organizer that will handle much of the project's production and coordination. In Muscat, the Ambassador will convene a group of prominent residents, American and Omani, to provide advice to the Omani organizers better target the event, and help them obtain maximum media exposure.

5. Muscat Municipality President Abdullah Abbas laid out plans for a planning visit to the U.S. (led by him, with the remaining members of the delegation still to be determined) from June 30 through July 11; however, he indicated that there is some flexibility in the timing. The visit will move the project forward by giving official imprimatur to the plans now in place and by ensuring Omani familiarity and comfort with the potential venues and U.S. partners. During its time in the U.S., the delegation seeks to meet with appropriate offices at the Departments of State and Homeland Security; the Coast Guard; mayors' offices (and if at all possible with each of the mayors) in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, as well as, possibly, appropriate ranking municipal authorities in Alexandria, Virginia; municipal organizations that handle international events such as this in each city (convention and visitors bureaus or similar); and each city's port authority. It may also be beneficial for the group to witness July Fourth celebrations in one or more of the cities as time allows.

6. ACTION REQUEST: Post seeks addressees' cooperation in ensuring the success of this delegation's visit, including coordinating with all appropriate federal agencies and mayoral offices, and offering all possible assistance when contacted by the Embassy of Oman and/or the Sultan Qaboos Center. Washington is asked to advise on the timing of Municipality President Abbas's visit to the U.S. in early July. Embassy Muscat's point of contact for the project is Public Affairs Officer Robert H. Arbuckle (office: 968-24-698-989, x433, e-mail arbucklerh@state.gov). SQCC's Executive Director is Heidi S. Shoup (office: 202-785-1141, x232; e-mail: director@sqcc.org). END ACTION REQUEST.

GRAPPO